



OESNEWS

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

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OES Provides Tulare County Sheriff's Department with \$639,000 Grant to Monitor Sex Offenders

SACRAMENTO – During the Tulare County Board of Supervisor's meeting today, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) presented a check for \$639,000 in grant funds to the Tulare County Sheriff's Department to support efforts to monitor, investigate, apprehend and prosecute habitual sex offenders in the county.

"We are pleased to provide Tulare County Sheriff's Department with these grant funds for its Sexual Assault Felony Enforcement Team Program (SAFE)," said OES Director Henry Renteria. "With more than 80,000 registered sex offenders currently living in California, it is essential that local law enforcement have the resources they need to monitor sex offenders and ensure that they don't violate their parole."

There are currently 1,017 registered sex offenders living in Tulare County, and nearly 25 percent of them are not registered.

The purpose of the SAFE Team Program is two-fold: 1) to increase the registration compliance rate of sex offenders, and to arrest and prosecute sex offenders who violate the terms and conditions of their probation or parole, who fail to comply with registration requirements, or who commit new sexual offenses and 2) to deliver public education on Megan's Law in order to protect the public from sexual assault. California's Megan's Law provides the public with certain information on the whereabouts of sex offenders so that members of local communities may protect themselves and their children.

"As Sheriff, the safety of our residents has always been my priority, with great emphasis placed on the protection of our youth. I appreciate the help of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services in these efforts by awarding our Department over \$600,000 for the SAFE grant," said Tulare County Sheriff Bill Wittman. "Investigators funded by the program will hold sex offenders accountable for violations of their registration requirements. This pro-active approach will enhance the safety of those living in and visiting Tulare County."

Tulare County's SAFE Team is comprised of six full-time staff: four sheriff's detectives, one district attorney investigator, and one probation officer. This team will monitor, investigate, apprehend, and prosecute sex offenders who fail to register along with those who commit new sexual offenses.

The Team is also organizing a proactive public information/education campaign to make the citizens of Tulare County aware of resources available to them to protect themselves and their families from sexual assault. One of these resources is an Offender Watch Database that will allow citizens to go online at home, access the sheriff's department Web site and click on the link for watched sex offenders in specific areas of their community.

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In addition to Tulare County, six other sheriffs' departments from throughout the state were selected through a competitive grant process to receive SAFE Team grant funds. They are as follows:

Los Angeles County Sheriff: \$1,199,000
San Luis Obispo County Sheriff: \$687,750
Santa Clara County Sheriff: \$953,250
Sacramento County Task Force: \$799,350
Shasta County Sheriff: \$689,700
Riverside County Sheriff: \$731,950

"These SAFE grants would not be possible without Governor Schwarzenegger authorizing the \$5.7 million in funding in this year's budget," said Renteria. "This program will go a long way in helping to apprehend and prosecute the nearly 15,000 (approximately 23 percent) of the state's sex offenders who are in violation of their registration requirements."

Background:

In 2002, the Legislature authorized and encouraged law enforcement agencies to establish SAFE Teams. The Legislature found that habitual sex offenders posed a significant risk to the welfare and safety of the residents of California, and that predatory sex offenders frequently traveled to areas outside of the jurisdictions where they lived in order to evade surveillance and possible arrest by local law enforcement agencies for probation or parole violations.

The U.S. Department of Justice reports that 18 percent of women experience rape in their lifetime, and that 54 percent of those are under the age of 18 when the rape occurs. OES provides funding to 84 Rape Crisis Centers throughout the state. Last year, these centers provided crisis intervention services to more than 26,000 victims of sexual assault.

According to the Attorney General's *Crime in California Report*, there were 9,598 forcible rapes reported to law enforcement agencies in California in 2004. However, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that only 28 percent of all rapes and sexual assaults are ever reported to law enforcement.

For more information on the SAFE Team grant and other criminal justice programs funded by OES, visit www.oes.ca.gov.